

Q: Good afternoon. Today is May 3rd, 2016. My name is Molly Walsh and I am here at the Falls at Cordingly Dam with John, and together we are participating in the Newton Talks Oral History Project that is being conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center. Okay, John, so what were you doing before you entered the service?

A: Several things. I graduated from high school, I'm from Indiana originally. The last three years in high school I moved from Indianapolis to a farm, 80-acre farm, and I was a farm boy. I learned how to milk cows and slop hogs and all of the things you do on a farm. And then when I got out of high school I worked a couple of jobs. I worked for the Farm Bureau, which is, we all worked at things dealing with the farm. And then this is during Korean, the Korean War, and they still had the draft then, and most guys my age, a year or so after you got out of high school you were going to be drafted in the draft. And I didn't know anything about the service. I knew a little bit. I knew that Marines were the first ones in and the last ones out, so I eliminated that from my list. I knew that the infantry was very, very tough, had to learn how to sleep in frozen mud, so that didn't appeal to me. So, me and my basketball buddies, we decided to join, and we did more than--

Most of our friends were joining the Air Force, so we flipped the coin to decide between the Air Force and the Navy, and the Navy won out or lost out. And we all three joined the Navy. We went in together and I was the only one that ended up making the Navy a career. The rest of them just stayed in for one [00:02:20]. And so that's how I started in the military.

Q: So, how did you join the draft and why did you choose that specific branch?

A: Because, as I stated, Marines were the first ones in, the last ones out, and I didn't want to do that. And I thought that the Air Force and the Navy offered a little more what I was interested in. And in hindsight I'm glad I did join the Navy, because I received, I have never been more than a

hundred miles away from Moore's Bore and in six months I've been all around the world. So, that was appealing to a young kid.

And I didn't particularly like the military way of life, because you have to adapt to it, but eventually I did.

Q: So, where exactly did you serve and do you remember arriving and what was it like?

A: Well, I served many, many places. I went through a basic training that took three months. Then I was at my first assignment was to USS Toledo. That was a heavy cruiser. It was home ported in Long Beach, California, and I was on it about two months and then we were deployed to Korea for 12 months I think it was. And we were on the bomb line over there, shelling the, shelling the beach and getting shot at. And that's where I was for the first year.

Q: Tell me about a few of your most memorable experiences.

A: Well, I think Korea was the coldest place I've ever been in my life. I brought some pictures of Korea. And everything was covered with ice. The whole ship was covered with ice. So, you had to be very careful if you did go topside, you were slide all over the place. I guess it was very hot in the summertime. I wasn't there during the summertime, but I know it was very cold. And we were all scared. And where I finally came back to the States I wanted to see if I could get something different. I didn't like that cruiser at all. So, I didn't know what I wanted to do.

I just kind of, I had a cousin that was in the submarines during World War Two, and I kind of envied him. So, I put in for submarine duty, and not thinking I would get chosen for that, because it's very tough to get chosen for that. And surprisingly, I was selected to go to Submarine School, and I did, and so that was three months, and then after that I was assigned to my first submarine. I went from New London, Connecticut, took a boat, we called submarines boats, through the

Panama Canal all the way to Hawaii, and that was my first submarine and I really enjoyed it. And it was 13 different subs.

But it's not for everyone, but I did enjoy it. And they pretty well screen for Submarine Duty beforehand, and it's strictly voluntary. So, you're kind of a select group. And I never regretted it. And I had some things that weren't too nice and some pretty nice. I got to see a lot of the world. I have been many, many places. Most of it was in the Far East. The Atlantic, most of what I saw in the Atlantic was Russia through the periscope, but never went on the beach in the Atlantic, but I was all over the South Pacific.

Q: Do you recall any particular humorous or unusual events?

A: Any what?

Q: Particular humorous or unusual events.

A: Yeah, a couple unusual events. One time we hit a-- The bottom of the ocean is not flat. It's mountainous, just like the Earth is. And you have, if you have a map of land it's called a map, a map of water is called a chart, that's the difference between the two. And you have bottom contours charts which are supposed to show the layout of the bottom where the mountains are and the slopes were. The whole ocean is not charted correctly. There is places that are not charted. And at one time we hit the top of this submerged mountain, and we hit it like an airplane peeling off, peeling down. And we made it out of that. That was pretty scary.

Another time we had a hot run torpedo, torpedoes that they were working on took off running, and the smoke filled up in the compartment just like that. So, there were about eight of us in the compartment and we hit it, got through the hatch, but one guy went the wrong way, and we

found him up between the tubes and we were on patrol where we couldn't surface, and it was pretty bad for him. But they weren't all like that.

Q: Do you recall the day your service ended?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Do you recall the day your service ended?

A: You mean the day the war ended or the day my service ended?

Q: Your service.

A: My service ended, I think it was November the 5th, 1972. I went in in '52 and I was in 20 years.

Q: What was that like for you?

A: Well, actually I wasn't officially out then. You have to serve a total of 30 years. But I had served 20 years in Active Duty, and another 10 years in the Inactive Reserves, and then you're officially retired. So it felt good. I got a paycheck every month.

Q: What was it like to return to your civilian life?

A: Well, it was pretty easy for me, because what I did in the military, I was Navigation. I started out as a Signaller, that is talking with flags and flashing light, and then that was changed to Navigation. And I enjoyed that. I did all forms of navigation. That was back when we still used the sextant, I think the only place you could find a sextant now is in a museum, but I enjoyed

that. And then when I got out I didn't want to go to sea again, I had already been gone for 20 years, and that is the one downside, all I could do is go back to sea if I wanted to do the navigation.

But I got interested in music, and I had a knack for music. I didn't realize it at the time. I could always sing. And so I wanted to see if I could make a living playing music. And I was very lucky, I was in the right place at the right time and I was able to do that for the next 30 years. And I just was lucky. I could pick up an instrument and play it in 30 minutes. So I did that for a long time. So I had a couple different careers, very diverse careers. And then after that I retired from the music business about 15 years ago and I did several odd jobs after that.

Q: How did your service and experiences affect your life and your outlook on war and the military in general?

A: Well, I think all war is terrible. Unfortunately it seems like we're always at war for one reason or another, but everything I saw was bad. I think the service can serve a lot of people, do them some good, if they don't have any idea what they want to do it gives them something to do while they're thinking about what they would like to do maybe, but having said that, everyone cannot adapt to the military way of life. I have known people who just cannot adapt to it. Some can and some cannot, and if you can't then that is not the place for you. You have to learn how to take orders before you can give orders. That is kind of the basis for the military, I think.

Q: How did you adapt to military life, including the physical regime, barricades, food, and social life?

A: I guess I adapted pretty well. For one thing I started out with two buddies I went through high school with who were both doing the same thing and we kind of leaned on each other. We

would joke with each other and things like that. So, I didn't have any problem adapting to it, but some guys did, but I didn't have no problems with it.

Q: How did you stay in touch with your family and friends back home?

A: That was a problem. This is long before computers and we were underwater all the time, and if we were lucky maybe once a month they would have a mail drop. You would have to come to the surface, depending on what you were doing whether you could come to the surface or not. This is before the nuclear power subs, and on the nuclear power subs, and this is still the norm today, you get underway, you go out below the hundred fathom mark, and you're submerged and you don't come up again until you come back into port. I mean the normal tour of the submarine today is you're underwater for three months at a time. The air that you breathe, you make it from out of the water you're sitting in, so you're all totally self-sustained.

But yeah, you had virtually no contact with home for a long time. That was pretty tough. That was tough.

Q: It looks like our time is just about up. What is one more thing that you would like people a hundred years from now to know about your time in service?

A: Wow. I don't know. A lot of time in Korea, we're still having problems with Korea today, and then I spent the other part against Russia, but it looks like we're getting ready to go back against Russia again, so what good did it all do. It kind of makes you wonder. But I hope no one else has to go to war.

Q: Well, thank you so much for taking time to do this with us today. We are very happy to be able to include you in our Newton Talks Oral History Project.

A: Well thank you.

Q: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW